DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 452 PS 023 345

TITLE	Assessment in Early Childhood Education: Status of the Issue. A SERVE Research Brief.
INSTITUTION	Southeastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE), Tallahassee, FL.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Apr 95
CONTRACT	RP-91002010
NOTE	11p.; For an earlier report, see ED 368 507.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Classroom Observation Techniques; Early Childhood Education; Evaluation Criteria; *Evaluation Methods; Family Involvement; *Holistic Evaluation; *Informal Assessment; Parent Participation; Parent Teacher Cooperation; Portfolio Assessment; *Student Evaluation; Student Journals; Student Projects
IDENTIFIERS	*Alternative Assessment; Authentic Assessment

ABSTRACT

Alternative assessment not only offers the opportunity to assess what students know, it also can more fully engage students in their own learning. When properly implemented, alternative assessment has the potential to: be a useful classroom tool, stimulate student participation; form a communication bridge with parents; and measure specific types of student learning. Two types of alternative assessment are authentic assessment and performance assessment. Assessment techniques include portfolios, student journals, and student projects. Ideas for teachers wishing to develop and use alternative assessment within the classroom include the following: (1) develop a clear rating scale with several categories; (2) plan how to assess what the students have learned; (3) have a partner with whom to share ideas and experiences; (4) make a collection of examples and activities; and (5) expect to make mistakes but also to learn from these mistakes. The use of alternative assessment may require more communication with parents, especially when first implemented. Teachers can explain to them the purpose of using this kind of assessment and how such assessment can help their children be better prepared for the "real world" and help to make them active participants in school events as well as at-home activities. (AA)

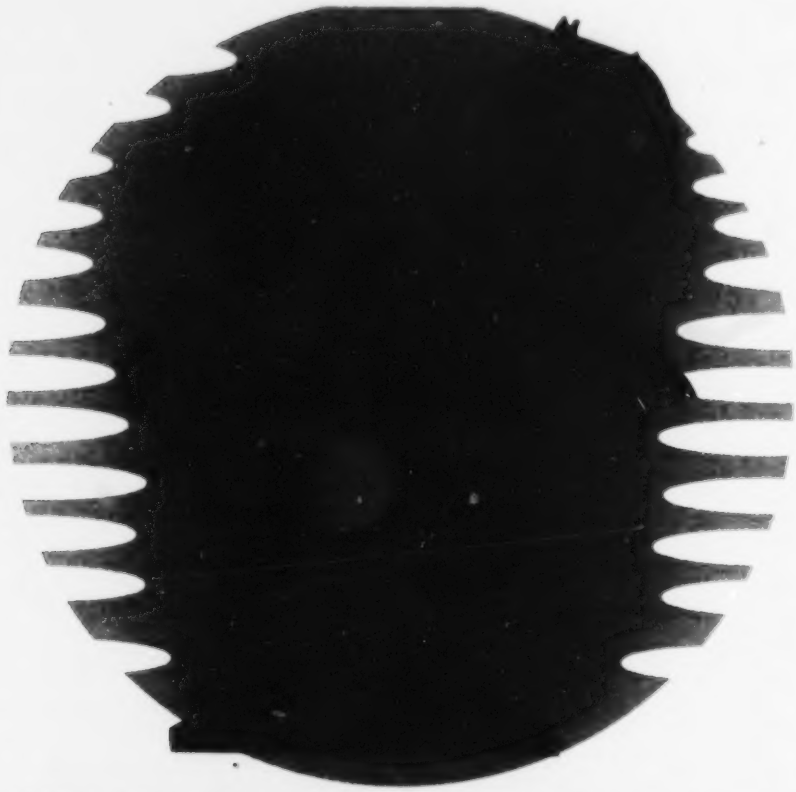
****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

SERVE

ED 383 452

Assessment in Early Childhood Education: Status of the Issue

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy



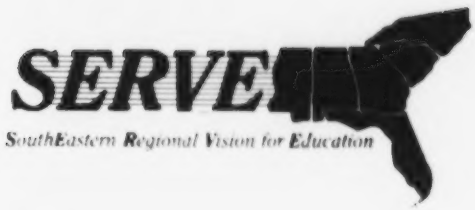
SERVEing Young Children

PS 023345

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Assessment in Early Childhood Education: Status of the Issue

April, 1995



A Research Brief of
The SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education
affiliated with the
School of Education
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
P.O. Box 5367
Greensboro, NC 27435
(800) 755-3277

The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

This document was produced with funds from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education, on contract no. RP9 1002010.

Preface

This research brief provides an outline of the components of alternative assessment as well as methods to collect that information and material. There are also ideas for developing and using alternative assessment within the classroom. Finally, this brief describes the use of alternative assessment as a means for communicating with parents. It is hoped that the page provided at the end of the brief, specifically for parents, will serve as a basis for future discussions between parents and teachers.

Acknowledgments

SERVEing Young Children would like to extend appreciation to the following people for their review and valuable input into this document:

Nancy Livesay, Project Coordinator
SERVEing Young Children
Tallahassee, Florida

Jim Bleyer, Information/Communication Specialist
SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education
Tallahassee, Florida

Sterling Dupont, Resident Principal
Department of Education
Tallahassee, Florida

Caroline Follman, Teacher
Holy Comforter Episcopal Day School
Tallahassee, Florida

Melanie Jensen
Center for the Study of Teaching and Learning
Florida State University
Tallahassee, Florida

Beth McGrotha, Teacher
Gilchrist Elementary School
Tallahassee, Florida

Becky Ogletree, Field Representative
SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education
Tallahassee, Florida

Donna Weisman
Student Assessment
Leon County Schools
Tallahassee, Florida

Assessment in Early Childhood Education: Status of the Issue
was written by
Glyn Brown, Program Specialist, SERVEing Young Children,
and designed by
Glenda Johnson, Senior Design Specialist
SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education
Tallahassee, Florida

Assessment in Early Childhood Education: Status of the Issue

Purposes of Assessment

In the past, testing has tended to focus more on whether or not students got the answer correct and less on how students actually arrived at their answer. In more recent years, however, educators and educational policy makers have begun to question the role of testing in students' achievement, particularly the testing of young children. Too often, scores from standardized tests have been used inappropriately to delay school entry, retain large numbers of children, and place children in unsuitable educational programs (Shepard, 1994). While standardized tests may be problematic at all ages, they are especially questionable in primary grades when children's development can be most sporadic and uneven (Perrone, 1992). For example, many young children have difficulty in attending, relating, and conforming to the expectations of formal testing. There is also some indication that standardized tests may not accurately measure the capabilities of children who have some difficulty coping in the mainstream, such as children from disadvantaged families, children with special needs, and children with limited English proficiency. This is not to say that traditional standardized testing should be completely replaced with another system; however, standardized tests may not always be the best way to assess how well a student can think, analyze, or solve problems.

As a result of these concerns, greater attention is being paid to classroom assessment and classroom uses of **alternative assessment.** Alternative assessment includes any type of assessment in which the student is able to create a response to a question rather than simply choose from a given list (e.g., multiple-choice, true/false, or matching). Alternative assessments can include essays, oral presentations, short answer questions, and portfolios. Alternative assessments will generally fall into two categories: **authentic assessment and performance assessment** (Laboratory Network Program, 1995).

Types of Assessment:

- Authentic Assessment: Authentic assessment refers to assessment tasks that elicit demonstrations of knowledge and skills in ways that resemble "real-life" tasks as closely as possible. For example, a young child may be asked to demonstrate how he or she would solve a math problem; however, the math problem reflects something that the child might encounter in real life, such as grocery shopping or buying a toy. Within Native American cultures, authentic assessment might involve using objects that are consistent with the cultural ways of the community, such as measuring ingredients to prepare fry bread.

- Performance Assessment: Performance assessment refers to the observation of an actual student performance or example of student performance. A student's performance is judged on the basis of a pre-established criteria. Examples of a student's work may include an oral presentation, conducting an experiment, teaching a skill or concept to other members of the class, or acting out a story in sequence.

A wide variety of assessment techniques may fall into these broad categories of performance and authentic assessment. Several of these techniques are described below.

- Portfolio Assessment - A portfolio is a collection of the student's work which illustrates the student's effort, progress, and degree of proficiency (Laboratory Network Program, 1995). Portfolios are usually files or folders that contain samples of the student's work that represent specific accomplishments. Because portfolios are assembled over time (e.g., a school year), they provide a broad picture of the student's performance, and can even be passed on from year to year (to assess students' long-term progress). The material contained in a portfolio is organized in terms of category (e.g., cognitive, social, and physical) and in time sequence. A portfolio might contain such items as a sample of the students' written work, group assignments and ideas, and creative expressions. Portfolios can be used to help students assess their progress, assist teachers in

making instructional decisions, and provide parents with an opportunity to view students' work (Hamm & Adams, 1991). It is also an effective tool for children with limited English proficiency or special needs because teachers may select a modality of assessment based on the individual child's needs and abilities.

➥ Journals - A journal is a daily log kept by the student which reflects the student's ongoing activities and observations. Students may be asked to write about their goals for a particular class, the strategies they used to address specific problems, and what they are doing in the class. Maintaining a journal can be one way for the student to communicate to the teacher what he or she does and does not understand. This can provide teachers with an opportunity to assess the degree to which the student has been able to comprehend the material and evaluate the student's current interest and attitude toward the material. Journals may also be a way of assessing the young child's development of fine motor skills and their knowledge of spelling and grammar (Bagley & Gallenberger, 1992).

Sample Content of a Student Journal:

- Personal feelings or reactions regarding themselves or the activity (positive or negative reaction). For example, "Today in class my favorite activity was . . ." or "What did I like or dislike about today's activity?"
- Understanding of concepts (e.g., "I'm still confused about . . ." or "What is one thing you learned today that you didn't know or understand before?").
- Skills or strategies learned during class (e.g.,"These are the strategies I learned today . . ." or "What was the special topic learned today?").

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Many young children have difficulty in attending, relating, and conforming to the expectations of formal testing.

A Look Inside a K-2 Portfolio: What kinds of student work or other information might be contained in a young child's portfolio? (Adapted from The Education and Care of Young Children: Report of the ASCD Early Childhood Consortium)

- Anecdotal records (i.e., series of teacher's notes or observations about a child's behavioral patterns)
- Self portraits drawn by the child at both the beginning and end of the school year as well as pictures of events, persons, and animals
- Information from an interview with the child conducted at the beginning of the school year that focuses on his or her favorite activities and reading interests. Samples of work demonstrating that these activities or interests have been included in the portfolio
- Samples of the child's free writing. This may include translations by the teacher if invented spelling or sketchy syntax make them difficult to read
- A tape of the child's ability to retell a story, recorded at intervals during the course of the school year
- Work samples demonstrating the child's understanding of number concepts (e.g., the number "4" printed on a sheet of paper and the appropriate number of beans glued beside it)
- Photographs of significant achievements, such as a child's block tower

- Projects: Projects are comprehensive demonstrations of skills or knowledge (Rudner & Boston, 1991). As part of a project, students may be required to conduct a demonstration, give a live performance, or turn in a written project. Projects can take the form of competitions or collaborative learning between individual students or groups or students. Asking young students to build a tower with blocks and demonstrate their knowledge of "short" and "tall" is an example of this type of assessment.

These techniques represent just a few of the ways in which teachers can assess student performance. The feature shared by each of these methods is that they require students to be active participants.

Summary

Research tells us that children learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process. Alternative assessment not only offers the opportunity to assess what students know but it also can more fully engage students in their own learning. When properly implemented, alternative assessment provides teachers with an opportunity to link their curriculum and teaching efforts to the actual skills children need to master. Alternative assessment has the potential to be a useful classroom tool and can stimulate student participation, form a communication bridge with parents, and measure specific types of student learning (Arter & Spandel, 1992).

Source: *Helping Your Child Succeed in School* by Dorothy Rich, illustrated by Betty MacDonald, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Getting Started*

One of the hardest steps is getting started. A teacher who wishes to implement alternative assessment in his or her classroom may feel more comfortable starting very small, perhaps beginning with only one unit or class. Here are some basic ideas for getting started:

- **Start small.** In the beginning, follow someone else's example or conduct one activity in combination with a traditional test. Teachers who have already begun to use alternative assessment in their classrooms are good sources for ideas.

- **Develop a clear rating scale with several categories.** Since developing a rating system for judging student performances is difficult, it will be important for standards and expectations to be clear. In the beginning, it may be helpful to use characteristics of current student performance to generate performance standards for the class.

- **Plan for assessment.** As you plan your instruction, think about how you want to assess what the students have learned.

- **Have a partner.** It is easier to try something new if you have a colleague with whom you can share ideas and experiences.

- **Make a collection.** Begin collecting and keeping a file of examples of alternative assessments or activities that can be adapted for your own students.

- **Finally, don't give up.** Remember, this is new to both you and your students and it will take some time before you are comfortable with the method. Expect to make mistakes but also learn from these mistakes. Ask yourself questions such as, "What worked?", "What should I have done differently?", and "Did my students learn from this activity?"

***General Guidelines for Constructing Alternative Assessments** (adapted from Rudner & Boston, 1994).

Source: *Helping Your Child Get Ready for School*, by Nancy Paulu, illustrated by Annie Lunsford, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Talking with Parents

Although there is a great deal of enthusiasm among educators for the use of portfolios and other forms of assessment, implementation may be difficult for a number of reasons. One of the difficulties may have to do with the failure to fully explain these new assessment techniques to parents and involve them in the initial decision to use them in the classroom. Most parents like receiving more detailed information about how their child is progressing; however, they will have very definite questions about what the information means and how it will be used. Here are some ideas for working with parents and talking about the different types of assessment:

- Spend some time explaining to parents why new assessments might include portfolios, journals, and other performance events.
- Show them how an increased emphasis on problem-solving, group cooperation, and critical thinking can help their children be better prepared for the "real world."
- Provide parents with an opportunity to participate in various alternative assessment events, and encourage parents to develop activities at home.
- Invite parents to performances or demonstrations.
- Send home samples from portfolios. The more parents can see actual examples of student work, the more comfortable they will feel with the new system.
- Suggest games that parents and children can play that involve problem-solving skills (e.g., dominoes, checkers, or puzzles).
- Ask parents to allow their children to help with chores such as cooking or laundry. Children can be asked to measure ingredients or sort laundry into different categories (adapted from EdNews, 1992).

References

Arter, J.A. and Spandel, V. "Using Portfolios of Student Work in Instruction and Assessment." *ITEMS: Instructional Topics in Educational Measurement.* National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME), 1992.

Bagley, T. and Gallenberger, C. "Assessing Students' Dispositions: Using Journals to Improve Students' Performance." *The Mathematics Teachers*, 1992: 660-663.

The Education and Care of Young Children: Report of the ASCD Early Childhood Consortium. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development 1992.

EdNews. "How Teachers, Students, and Parents Can Work Together." Lexington: Kentucky Department of Education, 1992.

Hamm, M. and Adams, D. "Portfolio: It's Not Just for Artists Anymore." *The Science Teacher*, (May 1991): 18-21.

Laboratory Network Program. *Improving Science and Mathematics Education — A Tool Kit for Professional Developers: Alternative Assessment.* Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory Document Reproduction Service, 1995.

Perrone, V. "On Standardized Testing." *ERIC Digest.* EDO-PS-91-8.

Rudner, L. and Boston, C. "Performance Assessment." *ERIC Review* 3 (1994).

Shepard, L. "The Challenges of Assessing Young Children Appropriately." *Phi Delta Kappan* (1994): 206-212.

Resources

To Find Out More About Alternative Assessment:

Articles, Reports, and Books

Appalachia Educational Laboratory and Virginia Education Association (1992). *Alternative Assessments in Math and Science: Moving Toward a Moving Target.* Charlotte, WV: AEL. ED 355 256.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation (1994). *Performance Assessment.* Washington, DC.

Herman, J. L., Aschbacher, P. R., & Winters, L. (1992). *A Practical Guide to Alternative Assessment.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. ED 352 389.

National Association for the Education of Young Children and National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. (1991). *Guidelines for appropriate curriculum content and assessment in programs serving children ages 3 through 8.* Washington, D.C.: NAEYC, # 725.

Southern Early Childhood Association (1994). *The portfolio and its use: Developmentally appropriate assessment of young children.* Little Rock, AR: Author.

Organizations Involved in Alternative Assessment Research or Development

National Association for the Education of Young Children
1509 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-8777

National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing
CRESST/UCLA Graduate School of Education
145 Moore Hall
405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90024-1522

National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME)
1230 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(Produced a series of teacher modules, known as ITEMS, on the design and development of alternative assessment)

SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE)
345 S. Magnolia, Suite D-23
Tallahassee, FL 32301

Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA)
P.O. Box 56130
Little Rock, AR 72215-6130

WHAT DO PARENTS WANT TO KNOW ABOUT ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT?

Why change from the traditional way of assessing children and reporting progress to this new way of assessing children?

Many schools have begun changing what they teach in the classroom so that it is more in line with what students will need to succeed in the "real" world. For example, to succeed outside of school, students need to begin to develop skills that will allow them to think critically, learn to solve problems effectively, work with others, and communicate effectively with others. As educators begin to include some of these skills in their curriculum, they have realized that these are skills that cannot always be assessed using traditional classroom tests (i.e., multiple-choice or true-false questions). For example, if a teacher wanted to assess a student's skillfulness in using money, then he or she might create an activity where the student was able to demonstrate the use of money by buying or selling items in a store. While traditional assessment has tended to focus on whether a student got the answer right or wrong, alternative assessment focuses on the student's reasoning, understanding, and the type of strategies used to solve a problem. Alternative assessment is designed to stimulate students' thinking and learning to apply knowledge in real world situations. Skills, such as spelling, grammar, and computation are not abandoned, but they become part of the larger context of learning.

What are the benefits for students?

One of the benefits of using alternative assessment is that the assessments themselves are real. Assessments are designed to replicate and simulate the tasks and challenges of the real world. As such, alternative assessments can provide real evidence of higher-order thought processes, whereas multiple-choice tests often seem to be more a reflection of how well the student was able to memorize certain facts. In addition, alternative assessment can show concrete examples of how well a student is learning.

Just as important as what alternative assessments tell teachers about students is what they can do for students. Participation in alternative assessment tasks is more likely to motivate students because it requires students to structure and apply information, and helps engage them in the learning process. Moreover, alternative assessment encourages students to reflect on their own learning and begin to take responsibility for this learning.

Can parents benefit from alternative assessment?

Alternative assessment provides parents with the opportunity to directly view student's work, not simply glance over test scores. In addition, parent-teacher conferences can focus on the child's growth and progress (i.e., what the student has accomplished and how he/she has progressed) rather than how he or she is functioning in comparison to other students.

What can parents expect to see with this new form of assessment?

One of the new things that parents may see are portfolios. A portfolio is a collection of the student's work — written reports, art work, poems, stories — that is gathered over a period of time.

What is in it?

Often, portfolios contain a "showcase" section of the student's best work with selections made by student, teacher, and/or parent.

What is it for?

A portfolio will grow and change with the student and will reflect the learning process that is taking place within the student. A portfolio can provide the teacher and parent with an opportunity to view directly the student's work and a vehicle to discuss the progress the student is making.

Are there ways in which you, the parent, can become more involved in these activities?

- Attend performances or exhibitions. Help with fairs and showcases.
- Ask to see and contribute to portfolios.
- Attend workshops for parents offered by the school.
- Develop activities at home (e.g., make a game of figuring out simple problems, play games that involve problem-solving such as checkers or puzzles, think of household items that you and your child could use to conduct you own math and science activities).
- Attend conferences when they are requested by your child's teacher.

Reproduce and send home to parents.

The SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) is the federally funded education laboratory serving Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Missisippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Governed by a coalitiion of business leaders, policymakers, and educators, SERVE works with states, districts schools to improve educational outcomes, especially for at-risk and rural students. SERVE's mission is to promote and support the continuous improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the southeast.